

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INFORMANT: NARONG HUL [CAMBODIA]  
CONDUCTED BY: MICHAEL BELL  
DATE: NOVEMBER 9, 1987**

**B = BELL  
H = HUL**

**LFP MB-R008-R009**

B: If I announce the date and my name, then maybe you can give your name to make sure that it's working?

H: Yeah.

B: My name's Michael Bell, and I'm interviewing for the Lowell Folklife Project. And today is November the 9th, 1987. The time is 1:25.

H: My name Narong Hul. I'm a former President of Cambodian Community, and also Founder and President of Buddhists Community of Cambodian in the City of Lowell, in the State of Massachusetts.

B: Could you tell me where you were born?

H: I born in ah, Battambang City in Cambodia on March 23, 1955.

B: March 23, 1955?

H: Yes.

B: How long did (--) How long were, did you live in Cambodia? [Unclear]

H: I live in Cambodia ah, twenty one years.

B: Twenty one years?

H: Yes.

B: Did you go to school there? And?

H: Yes.

B: What did you study?

H: I study in a general subject.

B: Umhm. And before you came to the United States (H: Yes) you were in Thailand, or somewhere?

H: Yes, I in Thailand for two years.

B: Two years, in camp?

H: Yes. In refugee camp for two years. In Thailand border, Cambodian and Thailand border. You know Cowdow Refugee Camp under the control of ah, United Nation.

B: And then you came to the United States after two years?

H: Yes.

B: What year was that?

H: That is on 1981.

B: 1981.

H: November 15.

B: You came to, to where?

H: To City of Lowell in the State of Massachusetts.

B: Oh, right to Lowell?

H: Yes.

B: Did you have relatives here?

H: Ah, no.

B: No?

H: Ah, my sponsor Dr. Glen Cooper, and one Attorney in Boston, his name is Peter Kelly. He sponsor my family to Massachusetts. And he found out that ah, City of Lowell has a few Cambodian family that ah, make me feel comfortable, rather live in another city that's ah, no Asian people, you know? So he afraid that I may feel alone, therefore he brought me here.

B: You weren't married at that time?

H: Yes, I'm do.

B: You were married when you came to us?

H: No, I, I got married in Cambodia in 1979, on February.

B: Did you have no, you had no children when you came here?

H: On the way to the United States I already have two children.

B: How old are they now?

H: Ah, right now the first one is seven years old, and second one six years old. Two boys. The first one name Reasmey Hul and Ponlou Hul.

B: Can you spell it?

H: Ah, R-E-A-S-M-E-Y, and the last name H-U-L. And the second one is Ponlou, P-O-N-L-O-U and the same last name Hul.

B: Hul.

H: Yes, H-U-L.

B: When you, when you first came here in 1981 ah, where did you start to work?

H: Mm. My first job is working as a Lab Assistant at Lowell Community Health Center of Lowell General Hospital. So now I worked there for about a few months. I found many Cambodian has a difficult life. To adopt an America life, American Life, you know. That's why I need to quit my job and expand my service to all area in the City of Lowell, in the State Public Welfare Department of Welfare in Lowell, Immigr, U.S. Immigration in Boston, Employment Center of Indochinese Refugee Foundation, and also I was elected to be a President of Cambodian Community. Start up, organize Cambodian Community to work, help people to have a better life over here.

B: Help them to find work and a place to live.

H: Yes. Start open a school for them to learn English secondary language. Get a job training for them to be ready to be on their own way to support their own family. To be off quickly from

the welfare system. And also have them to feel comfortable in the new medical system, because many a Cambodian came to the United States they are very unfamiliar with the new system. They feel uncomfortable about blood test, they believe that this is all blood test. They believe that this is amount of blood that they have in their own life, you know. And they don't believe that ah, the red blood cell, or the white blood cell may reduce more and more in the body. They just believe that it is amount of blood that I have in my body. Somebody take it away, what happen to me? I may die, you know, quickly, or have a short life, you know. Um, this one of the trouble that I need to go around with my people. Explain to them how happen, how the body reproduce the cell to support the health, you know.

B: What are some of the traditional medical practices that(--)

H: Ah, mostly because if Cambodian in Southeast Asia we are a poor country. Ah, only in the big city they use western style, you know, treatment. But beside the big city ah, most people they use a traditional treat, traditional treatment. Use a herb, leaf of the tree, root of a tree, and some time they use coining, oil over the muscle when they have a pain like a muscle pain, or they feel comfortable in some area [words unclear] coin it, you know. You use a coin and wrap it, you know.

B: Coin?

H: Yes. To coin it. And some (--)

B: And that takes away the pain. Does a special person have to do that, or can everybody?

H: Yes. Yeah, anybody can do that, you know, because it's very simple. And also they use like, like a burning. You use a burning medicine to burn on a spot, you know. To kill a bad, like ah, I don't know how it's called, because I'm too young to understand that too, you know. They believe that some of the cause of pain it's because of nerve damage, you know. So they just burn it. And kill the nerve and damage the nerve. So people don't feel any pain anymore. And sometime they use a needle. It's like acupuncture, to treat, you know.

B: Are there, are there still specialists who do that in the community, or?

H: Yes, they do. They need to be a special person who has experience to do that. But, unfortunately they don't have school to go for it. Our people continue to learn from generation to another generation.

B: Right. The traditional way.

H: Yeah, when, when they need a medicine they go to younger, you know, and pick up all under the different kind of herb, you know. Come and mix it around, you know.

B: It's kind of hard to find here though.

H: Yeah. Yes, and no where to find it. But they do have a place ah, that imports some material

from Asia in Chinatown.

B: In Boston?

H: In Boston.

B: Who, who are the people, who are the specialists who live in Lowell, who practice traditional medicine?

H: I didn't see anybody in Lowell who do that, because Lowell is a pretty new community.

B: Oh, yeah.

H: Just started. I believe pretty soon we'll have it, you know, because people still believe in that.

B: Do they also use western medicine too?

H: Yes.

B: Both?

H: Yes, they use western medicine too, you know. But sometime in a case like ah, some diseases are ah, a western cannot find it. Yeah, cannot find it. Like abnormal period, you know. Ah, in a western they believe ah, everybody healthy. They just a normal to have period. But in Asia there are special medicine to make people having good menstrual period. But in western they believe that emotional feeling of the people may change the date of menstrual period, you know. But it has some kind of complication ah, a medical that we cannot say which one is right, which one is wrong, because sometime it works, sometime doesn't.

B: When you first moved to Lowell (H: Yes) how large was the Cambodian Community?

H: Is about four hundred.

B: People, or families?

H: Yes, four hundred people. Four hundred people.

B: And now it's?

H: Right now it's about 14,000 of them, because the City of Lowell is a good place for opportunity to get a job, ah low crime, and also City of Lowell has a good network in helping organizing, helping refugees, new coming immigrants you know. Like International Institute is a, has office to help people to get like a lot of service.

B: When uh, when you first came here where did you live?

H: I live in ah, Market Mill, subsidizing housing.

B: Oh, where is that?

H: In ah, Market Street in downtown Lowell.

B: Is that, is that a place where lots of Asians lived at one time?

H: No. I'm the only one Cambodian live over there.

B: Oh, Was there a neighborhood where most Cambodians live?

H: Yes. Mostly our neighborhood, Cambodian family live in the Acre. Acre is a, is a bad neighborhood, but people came here has no money to support themselves. Depend 100% on welfare system, but is very little to, for them to support a big family. Especially when just came here they need many things. They need to buy winter cloths, need to pay rent, utilities. They didn't have anything left. No. They come with bare hand. No, that's why they need to force themselves to live in bad neighborhood for cheap price.

B: Were there problems living there with other groups in the Acre?

H: Because a Cambodian family, they escape from Cambodia. They have one goal in his mind is finding peace. Even though they live in a pretty bad neighborhood, something happen to them. They just keep quiet, you know. Keep away from them, you know.

B: Yeah.

H: They don't want to start any war anymore, because they spend enough time in the war. In Cambodia, kill their own people, kill their own friend, their own family. So before they came to United States they make, set up a goal that I want to be peace. No more wars. Stop war. That's why even though they get some problem they feel like it's normal, (B: umhm) you know.

B: So there were some problems sometimes with the others neighbors. (H: Yes) Non-Cambodians who (--)

H: Yes, like a break into the house. (B: Oh yeah) Some robbery but very few, you know. Break the windshield of the car, (B: Oh yeah) you know. A little bit like discrimination in the job, you know, but it's not a real big. It just feel like ah, you don't speak good English, you know. So you work in a hard place, you know, noisy place. Ah, but you're happy to do it if you like ah, it's not just happen to a Cambodian Community. It happened to all the nation. All nationality who just came to this country, you know. One look down on another as, you know. After many years of people feel like familiar with Cambodian. We do a good job. We have a lot of Cambodian to be a technician, engineer, lawyer, [unclear] and that's problem. It would be disappear. That's what I believe in, you know.

B: But education's important?

H: Yeah, education is important. They want children to get education. So future, their children would be Cambodian-American. So the problem would be disappear, you know.

B: Do your sons speak ah, English and Cambodian?

H: Yes, they do speak English, Cambodian.

B: Umhm. (H: Yeah) And they ah (--)

H: They, they (--)

B: Can they write Cambodian?

H: No, they cannot write Cambodia, they speak Cambodia pretty good, and little write English.

B: Umhm. [Unclear]

H: And they has a tendency to adapt American life more than a Cambodian culture, you know.

B: But they will grow up thinking that they're Americans first, Cambodian second?

H: Yeah, that's right. A Cambodian become a second [unclear]. They seem like they just want to know about what Cambodian is, but the way that they want to go is American life, you know. Sometimes they have argument with me. Like ah, why you do that? Why don't you do that? You know. Why I do it, because I used to do it, you know. I'm a little bit old. It's hard for me to change in just a few years from the way I used to live for many years. But my children found that a new ways better. Why don't you do it, you know. Easy and fast, you know.

B: Do they like American food?

H: Yes, they do. They like ah, hamburger, cheeseburger, you know.

B: Fried Chicken?

H: Yes, chicken. [a child's voice is heard in background saying, "banana"] fried chicken, you know. [laugh]

B: [Comment unclear]

H: [Chuckles] Yes. Even in a television program, movie, they like American movie more than Asian movie.

B: Oh, yeah?

H: Yeah.

B: So do you eat traditional Cambodian food at home, or do you eat both?

H: Both. (B: Both?) Both. We don't drink water any more. You know, we drink Coke, Pepsi-Cola, you know, juice, milk, and (--)

B: What traditions or customs would you, do you want to keep?

H: What are my, what I want?

B: Important values, or customs?

H: After I live here for a few years I found out that United States, American life has ah, more good things, but also has bad thing too. Like ah, a good thing like ah, your children has a freedom to speak, to say. So it's one of the best ways to let the children to get more research for a better way of their living. But the bad thing like a drug, you know. A drug like ah, children start to have like ah, six year old emotional very quickly. And sometime to much a freedom may lead them to the wrong way. If they do go the right way, that's great, but if they go to wrong way, it's difficult to bring it back, you know, especially even to go to school. They stay school for many years. They go out with American friend. And if a neighborhood is bad, some school has a lot of bad friend, smoking, cocaine, you know, drug, alcohol. They may also go along with them quickly too, you know. That's why I want them to learn about what is a good in America. And also keep what is good in our culture. Like ah, be polite to the parent, to friend, you know. And also work hard. Don't be a burden to the government, city, state, or to friend or parents. No, be on their own way and do the best you can in your life, for peace and freedom. And know how to use your own freedom, for profit to themself and to community.

B: Respect your parents?

H: Yes, I respect parents, you know, because, because I'm a Buddhist. What a Buddhist ah, teach us is be good in themselves and to the outside. What mean the outside, are parents, wife, children, community and all friend around, you know, not just good for themself. Is important like ah, you make a lot of money, you're not just enjoy for yourself. You need to share the money for the poor, for your neighborhood, for the city. Like a pay tax for the state of government. For the better community to your neighborhood. Support the growth of your neighborhood. To friend like ah, who need it. Who has a lack of ability to support themselves, you know.

B: When you first came here was the Temple? (H: No temple at all) Was there a Temple? No?

H: It will be a big problem to a Cambodian Community. After I elect to be a president Cambodian community, I work very hard to get a education, like ah, English secondary to help my people to speak English. Getting a job in Social Service, but it seem got like a one hand working. The people survive, but they still feel like they need one more thing. Like a man to



have two hand to work together. So after I do this story I'm thinking, and a lot interview with people, I found out that beside working, getting money, buy food, house to live in, they need a spirit. Have to support the body, you know. Get the food, money and clothes to support the need of the body. They need the spirit to support their own mind. That's why I organized a Cambodian Buddhist Community since March 23, March 13, 1983. To bring a people, especially old people who cannot adapt American life. And they still think about their own way of living. They feel alone to go outside. They feel afraid to go outside. They cannot learn English anymore, because his a mind is wear out. No, they spend sixty year in Cambodia, speak Cambodia, learn, eat, living and enjoy with a Cambodian living style. And this country is a big different. Language, you know a culture and the way people thinking, emotional feeling, physical and emotional feeling. So they afraid to go along with them. You know, and they feel, I cannot do it! So I need to help that people first and establish a Buddhist Community. Bring them together. Checking a Buddhist song and cook Cambodian food, you know, dress a Cambodian dress, you know. And they feel very comfortable. They feel, they feel like this is the way I want it.

B: Was there a Monk here?

H: Not yet.

B: At that time?

H: I just rented a space now for fifty dollars a month. I just rent a space for fifty dollars a month. Is very poor apartment. We met every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 1:00 o'clock. Sometime people stay until 5:00. They feel like, I don't want to leave here. So because of, of the people need it. People feel comfortable to do it. And especially it's a one way to bring people together. Support the Cambodian discipline. It's a grow very fast. People more and more come to attend. Until we have not enough space to serve them. We go to Institute, International Institute, I don't know, to afford the help. A big hall for a special celebration. So very busy, you know, sometime we don't have enough room for the people too, because how many Cambodian keep move in Lowell? More and more and more, because job openings more and more. Community has set up a network to serve people better and better, you know. And I myself very good about organization, go around, collect the money. And just after three years only we collect ah, money up to \$100,000. And we put just one of the building in North Chelmsford. And that's at 21 Quigley Avenue, and it costs \$250,000. And we spend the money to fix it, about \$50,000. Right now community keep booming up. More money has donate to a Buddhist Community. We buy another land plus one beautiful house. Together property costs right now half million dollar. And so three years only start from the rock, the bottom, from \$50.00 space of renting up to half million dollars property.

B: And it's on Quigley?

H: Yes, on 21 Quigley Avenue (B: where's that?) in North Chelmsford.

B: [Unclear] (H: Yeah) Oh yeah!

H: Right now it become one of the biggest Cambodian Buddhist Temple outside of Cambodia, in the world.

B: Are there Cambodians who live around the Temple? [Unclear]

H: Ah, a few family.

B: A few.

H: A few family. But it's not too far from City of Lowell. It's about five minute driving.

B: Is that North Chelmsford?

H: Yes. But it's close, you know?

B: Off of Middlesex?

H: Yes. A very quiet neighborhood. And a really nice place, you know.

B: And the people in the neighborhood has accepted the [unclear]?

H: Yeah we, we do have a little bit problem, because in North Chelmsford it's a, a nice neighborhood. It's a rich neighborhood. And people has live in a family house. And it's a non-Cambodian resident over there. So when we step into the ah, with thousand, thousand of people coming every week, ah, people start to feel surprise. What are these people coming from? What are they doing? What kind of religion is they hold, is they believe in? You know? And it's kind, some kind of ah interruptions, argument going ah, for the first couple months. But we try very hard to go along with the people. Open the door, welcome people, to explain what we are doing. What we are from. Feel free to answer all the questions what they want to know. Open the door, you know. Prepare food, you know, and accept them. Very warmly, pretty soon they will become our friend.

B: Have they?

H: Yeah.

B: They're coming to the Temple, and?

H: Yes, they come to visit the Temple. They want to study what, what is Buddhist for. And they found it's ah, it's another, another kind of good world, you know.

B: Has the Temple worked with other, say Christian

H: Yes, we do.

B: Religion, Ministers and (--)

H: Yes, we do. We do have some. A lot activity with the Christian and the Catholic. Like we have a meeting, and a World Religion Day celebration in the City of Lowell. We come together. Sit down among a hundred religion in the city, in the greater Lowell area, Lawrence and Chelmsford. And each people shared idea about how each religion has their own way to bring a peace to the world. And we are very happy, enjoy, be friendly. And we treat each other very well, you know.

B: Okay. When did you start your store?

H: Yes.

B: When did that happen?

H: Ah, I start my store February 15, 1987.

B: You have a good memory for dates.

H: Yes. [laugh]

B: February 15?

H: Yes.

B: 1987?

H: Yes.

B: It's growing.

H: Yeah, it's boom up very well.

B: That's not even one year.

H: Yeah. I doing very well, yeah. I'm appreciate to American system. And I'm appreciate to American ancestor that has set up a good system for American and for non-American is able to live very easily. It's a lot easy when to contribute and they willing to accept it. Example, like credit system.

B: Yeah, to get started in business.

H: Yes. ah, when I start my business I don't have so much money to start it. I use Creative Financing. I go to the book, study. I go out, make another phone call, find good deal, you know? And finally I make it, you know? In my country I cannot do it. I cannot do it, absolutely cannot do it. But over here.

B: Why couldn't you do it in your country?

H: Ah, because of ah, they spend cash. Everything cash, no credit. (M: Uh huh) So it's a difficult for us to do it by cash. You know, but in America if you do have good credit, establish good credit, and know how to prepare and take care of good credit, you may do it now. Even though we have no money, you may do it.

B: Are they still some Cambodians living in Lowell who ah, don't like to use credit? [Unclear]

H: Most of them, they do not family have credit. That's why it's my next goal after I resign from Cambodian Community and a Buddhist Community, I plan to help my people. To help Asian Community, Laos Community, to understand, to know about credit. About real estate. How to get their own house with no money, or little money, and how to prepare their own credit. How to be, enjoy an American credit system. Not just survive, how to succeed in American.

B: Are there many Cambodians now who own their own houses? Who are buying houses?

H: Yes. Some families they, they do pretty successful and ah, in house. They own like a four or five house. But it's about 2%. And 5% they own one house. And another 93%, they're still renting. (B: Renting) They're renting now. They do have some money, but difficult to, to find a house. To deal with a real estate company and also with a bank, because they don't know how to do it. They feel like it, they need so much experience to do it. That's why I study a lot. I needed to go talk with a lot of people in order to go out, step my feet into bank financing, real estate business, so I can help thousand of people to get a better house. Spend a house (--) Smartly spend their own money.

B: What areas of the city has the Cambodian community settled in?  
Still just the Acre, or moving out?

H: No, they're moving all around in a great city here. (B: unclear) In a greater Lowell area.

B: So they're not just, Cambodian Community does not just stay in one space?

H: No, they live separately. No.

B: Do you think that sometimes they feel a little isolated or [unclear]?

H: Ah, they do feel a little bit isolated, but because of they too many of friend around and they like okay, you know.

B: This sides almost gone, but I wanted to ask about ah, going back to some of the older traditions and customs.

H: Yes.

B: What things are still practiced from the older culture? Language, religion, food?

H: The language, religion, custom, food and a family connection.

B: The family's important?

H: Connection, yeah. They want a family live close together, not just away. Like our children get married, they stay with the family. And the children get a job they want to stay pretty close to area where they have their own family, if a family connection.

B: Which family, if a couple gets married, do they live with the, the man's family or, the woman's family?

H: Right now it's a little bit changed. Before they usually with the, the girl parent.

B: Girl's parents.

H: Right now the one is better they go.

B: Oh, I see. So it's changed.

H: A little bit changed. It depend on job, you know and opportunity for them to grow better.

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS

B: It's probably, I think Larry Flynn said that you keep the community's kind of archives of video tapes in the store of peoples weddings and other ceremonies.

H: No I don't.

B: You don't.

H: I don't, no. I don't. Before I do have, but I do not keep any more. [laugh]

B: Did it get to big or?

H: Because it's just of friend, you know, it belong to a friend. I cannot rent (B: right) a friend tape. You know, it's a personal property.

B: Umhm.

H: You know, cannot rent it. [laugh]

B: Right.

H: But I do have like some of document tape about history of Cambodia. I do have that.

B: That you can rent out to people and

H: Yes, it's a national document. So I may rent it you know.

B: Those are in Cambodian?

H: Yes, in Cambodia. And also I have a tape about traditional song, (B: Oh) traditional um, dancing, but in a video tape, you know?

B: Umhm. From Cambodia? The tape?

H: Yeah. Not yes, ah, not from Cambodia. Yes, from Cambodia I have some. Made in the United States I have some. But mostly in audio tape I have all of that in Cambodia over here.

B: Right. The songs.

H: I have about four hundred different type of Cambodian tape from Cambodia, you know.

B: Audio tapes.

H: Audio tape, but video tape I have a very few. Not so many.

B: But you have audio tapes with traditional music?

H: Traditional music.

B: Popular?

H: Yes, all kind. All kind. Even in religion I have also. There are about four hundred different. That's a lot [laugh]. That's a lot of them.

B: Are there people in the community who still play traditional music?

H: Yes they do. I sell a lot of them. I sell hundred, a hundred tapes a week in Lowell. It's ah, people still enjoy, and they feel like it's a good souvenir that they have down in Cambodia. Especially some song they sing and mention about your homeland, you know. Ah, some have specific city where they born over there. So they really enjoy it, you know. When they hear the song they feel like ah, they still live over there.

B: Are there some people who play the instruments here? Traditional instruments [unclear]?

H: Yes, they do. I do have some of them, some of ah, a tape that's made in the United States. But they play exactly the same as they did in Cambodia.

B: Are there some people living in Lowell?

H: Yes they do. Yes.

B: Who would I see to talk to about the traditional music?

H: You may see them during celebration, you know, because it cost money to, to organize them and to have them to play. It's about \$250.00. You may go on the celebration, it's free and you're very welcome, you know.

B: Who are the names of some of the players?

H: His name is Som. I don't know, I don't know his last name, but his name is Som. S-O-M. He's a manager of Cambodian Traditional Music.

B: Well where, where could I find him? Is ah,

H: It's a better for you to go to Cambodian M.A.

B: C.M.A?

H: No. M.A.A. (B: Yes) Yeah, ask them so they may contact for you.

B: Okay.

H: During celebration, even Buddhist or offered in celebration you will see all different things, you know. (B: Dance) And of course dancing, ah, the way they dress up. Even fool themselves you know. Even the way how people say how people believe, you know. It's all different. But it cost money to set up. Spend thousand dollar to do it.

B: What are the big celebrations?

H: The big celebration it just pass by about two month ago. A United Celebration. But very soon we have another celebration, but I don't know what celebration. You need to go to the Temple to ask, "what is your next celebration?" Because I go with American calendar. (B: unclear) I don't know about Buddhist calendar is going on you know, (B: right) unless I go to the book.

B: Yeah, but some of the big celebrations are like New Year?

H: New Years is our second biggest celebration. And the first one United Celebration.

B: United Celebration?

H: Yes. Cambodian [unclear] is one of the biggest.

B: What is that? What does that commemorate for celebration?

H: It's ah, people believe that in that day ah, all the soul of ancestor in heaven, or in hell was free to come and meet us in earth.

B: Oh!

H: So people bring food to the temple. And (--)

B: It's like a feast for the, for the dead?

H: Yes, and the spiritual all believe that the food they give to the Monk will reach, spiritually reach to all the family. It's important a family who die long time ago and live in a hell, because they commit a lot of sins they live in a hell. So they live in starvation, no food and a very bad place. So it's a time for them to join family over here, and get good food, you know. And it's time for ancestor who live in heaven to come and join and see each other in earth. Even though we cannot speak, or see each other ah, but they believe that they come together the same day. Same, yeah

B: On the western calendar what, when is that celebrated? When is it? October, November?

N: I believe it's about October, yes.

B: At the end of October?

N: Early October, (B: early?) early October.

B: Is that like similar to ah, the western All Souls Day, which is November 2nd.

N: November 2nd?

B: It's called All Souls Day. When all the souls of the ancestors  
(N: Yes, yes) you commemorate them.

N: Yes. What, what did you call it?

B: All Souls.

N: Also.

B: All Souls.

H: What is the name of the celebration in the Western?

B: All Souls Day.



H: All Souls Day? Yeah, same thing.

B: After All Saint's Day.

N: Yeah.

B: Halloween, the next days All Saint's Day, and then All Soul's Day.

N: Yeah, the same thing. All the soul of the ancestor come together, yeah.

B: Umhm, right. That's interesting. (N: Yeah) And then New Year is celebrated on what day of the [unclear]?

N: It's on February, no, April 13 (B: umhm) every years. It's a first day of Buddhist. Buddhist calendar, first day of Buddhist calendar.

B: Are there other celebrations that are important that you know of?

N: There's a lot of important celebrations. There's ah celebrate in memory of Buddha. The Lord, the God Buddha. When he born, when he die, you know what special activity is he doing to human being in the world. Is ah, that like in Christian, they like Easter. [Unclear].

B: What day is the Temple meeting? On Sundays?

N: Yes, they meet every Sunday morning. But it's not a real um, Buddhist calendar, because the people came over here they need to work hard. Yeah, only one day that they feel free to go to the Temple on Sunday.

B: So that's changed.

N: That need to be changed. Yeah. But change for the people not for the Monk. He still go with the Buddhist calendar. Because they do not go work. All they do is maintain the religion.

B: When did the Buddhist Monk come here? The one who's at the Temple now?

N: The first one came about two years ago in 1985. And because of he's very old and, the temp, the weather in New England is very cold. They cannot stay over here. He moved to California. (B: Oh) And we sponsor another Monk that just moved in about ah, a year ago, in earlier 1986. Right now, [unclear] he might stay over there.

B: In the store, (N: yes) what are popular video tapes? Are there some Cambodian and some ah, Hollywood movies, and (--)

N: Popular tape. The tape, it's a very popular is Asian tape, because many Asian member came over here, because of ah, the service we pro, we provide. It's a [unclear] on emotional feeling.

And also the tape it have it fit the need of ah, the, what they call like, is they like, you know, like a Kung Fu movie.

B: Kung Fu?

N: Yeah, Kung Fu movie. These are the best popular movie.

B: Where are those made?

N: Made in

B: China?

N: In China, in Hong Kong. And some of them, American movie, it's like Ninja movie. It's made in America. (B: Yeah) It's a good movie too. And a war movie. Action, I mean action movie. Rambo, boxing movie, wrestling, you know. They like this type of movie, you know.

B: What are the popular sports for Cambodians to play?

N: Boxing.

B: Boxing? It's for people too ah, (H: yes, boxing. People boxing) children box?

N: Yeah. I do have a (--) No, children doesn't box. (B: They don't) Only adults do it, but they do, there's a lot of match for championship. And the stars they plays is one of them. I do have some of video tape about Asian boxing.

B: Are there other sports that are popular? (N: Yes) Like soccer, or I don't know.

N: Yeah, soccer is good, but it's not too popular. (B: No?) People like to play better, they play boxing, you know. Is a danger, but they like to watch boxing more than the soccer.

B: [Long pause] Is this when you (--) When you got your business here, (H: yes) ah did you get a lot of customers who were not Cambodian too?

N: The first month that I open I do have a lot of ah, American customer, like Spanish, Portuguese American, but later on it changed. The Asian community start to come in, you know and started to come because they find that it's a place for them easy to communicate, better service, a price cheap, and movies, and movies they like, you know.

B: Right. Right. So you don't get as many non-Asian customers any more?

N: Right now it slow down to 25%. Um, before it's 60% is non-Cambodian and another 40% is Asian customer. Not just Cambodian, we have Cambodian, Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese, India, Korea, Chinese, yeah. Right now 75% is Asian customer and 25% is American.

B: Is there a Cambodian Restaurant in [unclear]?

N: Yeah, we have four Cambodian Restaurant in the City of Lowell.

B: Do you go, do you ever go to any?

N: Yeah, I try a lot. It's good.

B: Are they good?

N: Yes they good. [laugh] The City of Lowell right now it's become like an Asian town, because that's what people feel. Because a Cambodian, or Asian people feel they can find everything in the City of Lowell. They can find movie, they can find Temple, they can find association, they can find grocery, they can find ah, like hair-styling, restaurant, it's a complete thing. They feel like ah, this my own home.

B: What are some of the other Cambodian businesses? You say, your video store and four restaurants. What else?

N: Four restaurants, seven grocery store.

B: Seven?

N: Asian grocery store.

B: Umhm. And you said hair?

N: Ah, hair-styling. Hair-style, jewelry store.

B: How many? Ah, do you know how many?

N: Ah, two hair-styling, [B: unclear] um three jewelry store, one temple, that's a main important thing. (B: Yes) And one Cambodian Association. It has a lot of service to provide to the need Cambodian.

B: What are, what are the names of the restaurants? Do you know?

N: Restaurants?

B: What are the names of the four, four restaurants?

N: The four restaurants is, I don't know name. I just go and eat and I don't know the name very well.

B: Are they all down, located in (--)

N: Yes, in the City of Lowell, in downtown.

B: Downtown?

N: Yes.

B: One's right across from City Hall?

N: Ah, two or three across from City Hall.

B: Oh!

N: And another one at Fletcher Street.

B: Where?

N: Fletcher Street.

B: Oh, Fletcher Street?

N: It is not open yet, but is going to open very shortly.

B: Oh, it's not open yet.

N: Yes.

B: Do you think more and more Cambodians will start business? [Unclear] business?

N: I believe too. I believe too. And pretty soon they'll be a Real-estate and Insurance Company. Ah, it will be run by me. Yeah, to help people to get (--)

B: Housing.

N: Yeah, credit, housing and insurance.

B: Rental and selling?

N: Yeah. Buy a house, rent a house, lease the building for business. And the bank financing.

B: How's, what about a bank some day? We'll see (--)

N: A bank?

B: They'll be a Cambodian Bank?

N: I don't know. I can't say yes, or no.

B: It's too early.

N: Too much education need to go and too much money.

B: Too much money.

N: Yeah. It's hard to manage, to manage the bank, you know, because it's difficult. Very complicated. A lot of people need involve you know.

B: You first moved here in 1981. What kind's of jobs were Cambodian's working, already here?

N: Dishwasher, clean hotel, I'm custodian to [unclear] company. They will do everything they ask. They don't care what kind of job. Even noisy, dirty, pay cheap, they don't care as long as they can make money and live on their own way. They like to do it. Sometime because of the job, it's a little bit money, they work two or three job. And they work hard even on a weekend! After they save monies they buy new cars. They happy with a new car. They buy a house and what they go through and the difficulty in a job, it's finish, it's gone.

B: So has that changed?

N: Right now it changed.

B: More, better jobs.

N: Right now they need more money. There looking for better job. They need to go to school for better education. A lot of Cambodian right now get a job in a big giant company like Wang, Digital, you know. Uh, Raytheon.

B: So they start at, you know, \$9.00 an hour, or something?

N: \$9.00, \$12.00 for hour. But they do still have a Cambodian who old, cannot speak English, cannot go to school anymore. They still on a low pay job, you know. But, they still enjoy it. It's better than staying on welfare, or get like \$400 a month. They may work for, get \$400 a week, and proud to go out and buy and spend the money.

B: Where did you learn English? [Unclear]

N: In a refugee camp.

B: In a camp? They teach English?

N: Yeah, no I need too study myself. I do a lot of volunteer work for ah, United Nation. All different company.

B: Red Cross?

N: Yes. World Vision Foundation, International Rescue Community, [New Resolution?], Seven Day Adventist. And I started to speak English, you know with all the staff who speak English. And because of, we have a, a willing to learn hard. Quickly I do it.

B: If you'd gone to school here?

N: Yes, I do go to University of school, ah, University of Lowell for real-estate business.

B: So you will get a license [few words unclear]?

N: Yes, yes pretty soon. I got to, I need too, yeah, I need to pass for license. And I study a lot of book (B: I can see that) to prepare myself in a real-estate career, you know. License it's just nothing. License is like ah, you put a glove on your hand and go to the boxing, and doesn't know how to fight.

B: Right.

N: You need experience. License just make people look like a real-estate ah, people, but get into business it's need a lot of experience. A lot of knowledge, that the school doesn't teach.

B: Right. Would you, would you work for someone else to learn? Or would you just start.

N: Yes, I need, I need to buy a book, that's quite expensive. I need to attend a seminar. It costs \$550.00 just two days. Buy book that costs \$300 book. Need to call, contact with ah, real estate broker. Ah, real estate investor. Collect information, call, see the bank ask for more advice. Learn a little bit from everybody. Go to community, find out what they need. Go to the bank to find out what they have. And combined together to fit the need of the people. What way research and to design what is the best way to help people to get a better life.

B: You will keep this store too?

N: Yes. My wife take care the store.

B: And your brother works here too?

N: Ah, he's a part time [unclear]. Part time, working part time.

B: He also works somewhere else?

N: Yes he work in the Wang Company, full time job.

B: Do you have other brothers and sisters?

N: Yes, I have two brother living in here. One sister and another brother living in Chicago.

B: Oh!

N: And another brother, right now he's in Moscow, Soviet Union.

B: Soviet Union?

N: Yeah.

B: Moscow?

N: Yeah. [laugh]

B: Does he like it?

N: I don't know. He never can talk with me.

B: He can't ah, send a letter.

N: No. [B: unclear?] No connection. No connection. I get a letter from him once. Say, "I'm fine."

B: How long has he been there?

N: Doesn't send a letter to me.

B: How many years has he been there?

N: Ah, he just go to Moscow July 1987, for import and export training.

B: From Cambodia, did he?

N: Yeah, he from Cambodia to Russia.

B: He wasn't in a camp.

N: No no, he's in a city of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Because of Cambodia right now under control of Russia.

B: It's communist.

N: It's Communist Russia. So he got a training to be an import and export agent. I don't know how he feel, he feel good or bad. A letter he sent it to me he say, "I'm fine, but don't send a letter to me."

B: Oh!

N: Don't mention I'm your brother.

B: Yeah.

N: So it some kind of tough world, you know, because of what he say is a lot of meaning. He says mean a lot. "I'm fine. Don't send a letter to me. Don't say I'm your brother." So, why I cannot say we are brother?

B: He doesn't want them, (--)

N: Don't send a letter to see him.

B: He doesn't want them to know he has a brother in the United States.

N: In United States, no. I don't know how, how he's feeling?

B: It wouldn't be good for him. It might be not good for him.

N: Yeah.

B: They might not trust him if they (--)

N: Yeah.

B: Do you have other relatives in Cambodia, or in the camps?

N: No. Not at all.

B: They're all out.

N: Yeah, not at all.

B: That's great.

N: And in his letter he say, he say, "When you [receive?] my picture from the United States, just only the tear can mention how we feel. No word, no letter. No discussing. [long pause]"

B: Do you get to see your brother in Chicago?

N: Yes, I visit him once a year. One a year. My brother he want to escape to United States too, but he has a big family. Him afraid of his wife getting raped, the children getting lost in dark forest, you know.

B: Oh.

N: And afraid that he lost a family on the way to escape. You know, it very dangerous. Take, to



risk life to do it. So he has a big family can't do it. So he decide to stay. Freedom, or die to make it.

B: How did you get here? Was it um, difficult?

N: Ah, yeah very difficult. We need to walk through ah, thirty mile on a highway, pass through a lot of communist control, control post. They check, where are we going, check I.D. you know. Ah, where you from? Where you going? We lie them, we go to see parent, or brother and sister in another town. And we had to walk another thirty mile in a dark jungle. And need to spend only twenty, only twelve hour from sunset to sunrise, make sure the sunrise we get to the camp. If not the sunrise, when they saw us, the patrol post saw us, he shoot you to death. A woman got raped. Children got lost when a parent die, and no where to go. Die by like a wild animal, no food, no water. It's a mine, mine jungle. If a lot of people die in ah, unable to escape.

B: Into the camp?

N: Yeah, we need to pass through three communist line. Vietnam Communist, Khmer Rouge Communist line, it's a military line, you know. The first one is a Vietnam Communist, the second one is Khmer Rouge Line, the third one is a Khmer Liberation Line, and the fourth one is Thailand Military Line. And it's very difficult. Each line has a lot of mine, mine ground, you know. (B: Right) A lot of military patrol. I saw a woman got raped, you know. Killing, robbery and nobody care. And the end of the line is United Nation Camp.

B: Once you got there, did you put your name on a waiting list to (--)

N: Yes.

B: You get a sponsor and (--)

N: Yes. I need too ah, find people who can sponsor me to another country in the third world, because in a refugee camp it's just a temporary place to live. And the situation is not safe. So that's why I'm lucky to get out. Dr. Glen Cooper is volunteer to be ah, doctor at refugee camp. And I work with him as assistant, ah, medical aide. And we become very close friend. And he start to fill out application for me. He talk with U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. He talk to a representative in Boston. And he say, "I got a friend, Peter Kelly's Attorney do all the paper work, you know." Sign the paper work to support me. So finally I get it, you know.

B: Do you see him sometimes?

N: Yeah, right now (--)

B: When you go into Boston?

N: Yeah, I didn't see him any more. About years, ah, Dr. Glen Cooper right now he got a promotion to be a Director of Medical Research in ah, Europe. In London. English, England. And ah Doc., and Attorney Peter Kelly he got another job in a computer company in Tokyo,

Japan. So what I see him just by phone. When I need his advice, I call him. He's like my parent. He's financial support and information support. That's how I can grow very quickly in my life in the United States.

B: Were there other places people could go, from the camps? Or just in the United States.

N: No (B: other countries?) they go to a different country in the world.

B: With France?

N: Yeah, France, Canada, Australia, some Japan, and German, Germany and Switzerland, England and all the world country, you know, who want to accept refugee.

B: The families try to stay together.

N: Yes. After the first family get over there they try to sponsor another families coming. You know.

B: So you, there are still people coming to Lowell from the camps?

N: I believe right now is very few. I mean came to the country. Came to the United States, very few, because of political change.

B: Political change when?

N: Political change, I don't know. I have no idea what happened.

B: But you will sponsor, you can sponsor?

N: I already sponsor 75 family to come to the City of Lowell. Right now I do not do any more, because the goal I came to the United State for freedom and start a new life. When I start to think so much about outside, my family exhaust. We like a time in a family. We like a budget in a family. (B: Right) Sometime we run out of money, and we need to work hard to support a family. We cannot just go out and spend time with the people, with the people, and do so many things and forget about family, you know. That's why I need to go back to start my own business, but I still think ah, about community. But half of community and half of my family.

B: Are you studying to be a citizen? Do you have (--)

N: Yes, yes. I plan to be a citizen pretty soon. I'm already fill out application in U.S. Immigration in Boston. I wait for the call to take a test and swear in the court. I believe I make it, no problem. I'm very proud to be American.

B: Then you can vote.

N: Yes, I vote. Freedom and enjoy the freedom as in America.

B: Good. Both of your sons were born in Cambodia, or Thailand?

N: Yeah, is born in Thailand.

B: In Thailand.

N: Thailand Refugee Camp. But they are pretty small when they came here. One just about a couple of month, and one about a year and a half, yeah. But they don't recognize what they go through. They only see and they only know United State of America. Beside that they don't know. There is no feeling. When I show them a picture of refugee camp they just look and, then I, "is this what we go through." [Laughs] They seem like they don't believe it.

B: But you will tell them these stories though.

N: Yes, I have to.

TAPE ENDS